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Masks

by mystic_moogle

Summary

Princess Peach is perfect, but not around me. I'm just her tactician.

(AKA, an ode to all pushovers.)

Would you believe me if I told you that Princess Peach is one of my best friends here at the Smash Mansion? Probably not. But I can see her, walking up the landing to my room. She looks both ways, and then picks up her pretty skirts and starts running.

Things weren't always this way. In fact, I found her to be completely insufferable at first. She reminded me of Lissa, with her floofy dress and fragile form, except without a brain and a thousand times more annoying.

It was only a few months ago that our lovely camaraderie began, after a fateful match in the arena…

-x-

I stood at the brink Arena Ferox, sizing up my opponent as I waited for our two-stock match to begin. As cocky as it sounds, I couldn't help but smirk as I gazed at her from across the arena. She looked completely clueless, inspecting her white gloves for any traces of dust.

I didn't know much about Princess Peach at the time, but if she fought anything like the way she acted, then I knew this would be an easy win. Naga knows I needed those. Not that I doubted my abilities in the slightest, but when you're a newcomer being constantly pitted against veterans like Samus Aran and Fox McCloud, it becomes much easier this way.

"Prepare yourself," I said haughtily. She blinked her wide, glassy eyes and merely tilted her head to the side. Gods, did she even hear me? Maybe I wouldn't even need a battle strategy for this one.

The match commenced with a lively "GO!" and from there, it was smooth sailing. Her fighting style was *absurd*. She pulled turnips from the ground in hopes of damaging me. She tried to smack me multiple times with her little pink parasol. She even tried to battle me head on with her daintily gloved fists. Needless to say, you can probably imagine how that went.

By the time the match was halfway through, we were both at even damage. Wait! I can explain. She simply got lucky and managed to pull out two bomb-ombs from the ground. My tactics were flawless, I swear it on my honor as Chrom's tactician.

Anyways, I loaded up my Thoron tome in hopes of ending this madness. She would never suspect it, not with the way she was looking at me with her innocent eyes.

"You're not ready," I taunted, and her response was to start skipping over to me. Gods, was this woman daft? I almost felt bad for her, since I was planning on shooting a Thoron tome to her face. Ah, well.

"THORON!" I shouted. Suddenly, a noxious green gas began to fill my lungs as my arm shot forward, and I was met with excruciating pain. It felt as if a clap of thunder had pierced my body, stunning me momentarily as I gazed into the face of my assailant.

Was that a... smirk?

I didn't have much time to contemplate, and I went flying off the screen. To add insult to injury, she pulled out her pretty pink parasol and said, "Sweet."

Oh, Naga, this woman was going to pay.

With my Levin Sword and Thoron tome by my side, I descended from the platform and regarded her in a new light.

"Prepare yourself," I said, only this time, I truly meant it.

From there, the match was riveting and intense. Cheap tactics no longer worked on this strange woman, so the footing was even in that regard. Her style felt different, too; her silly moves had not changed, but she fought passionately now, playfully. She fought me with hearts and ribbons and yet, she had me at the edge of my feet.

I managed to eliminate her first stock right before she delivered a potent *smack* with her frying pan. I was lucky. My damage was up to eighty percent, so I didn't have much time to end this.

She descended from the platform with her tennis racket in hand, no doubt about to beat me up with it. I smirked. I was prepared. Bring it on, princess.

At that moment, we both noticed a group of smashers enter the auditorium: Mario, Link, and Luigi. ...Well, no matter.

My plan was to do a cold approach with my sword, and then surprise her with an Arcthunder after she had dodge rolled away. Stunned by my attack, I would then swoop in for some easy damage.

I glanced over at Peach to ascertain her position, only to notice something strange. Her confident mien had disappeared. Was I imagining things?

...She must have been trying to trick me again, with that sweet and nervous look on her face. Well,

this tactician had certainly learned his lesson.

I went in for the attack with my sword, fully expecting her to dodge out of the way.

She didn't.

Clumsily, I shot out my Arcthunder tome. Surely, she would dodge such an obvious attack, right?

She barely even moved.

I was taken aback by her actions; a feeling of disappointment settled in my stomach.

From there, the match was anticlimactic compared to the heart of the battle. It was an easy victory for me, but I couldn't understand why. What had changed?

I listened to the crowd (fake, they used audio recordings) cheer my name, expecting me to say my line.

"I'm always three steps ahead." I certainly didn't feel that way. I felt as though I was three steps behind.

"Peachie is-a so-a sweet!" I whirled my head around, just in time to see Mario gesticulating happily. "She would-a *never* hurt-a anybody!" His fellow spectators nodded in approval.

"Yeah, she's a real angel," Link agreed.

Luigi smiled. "I love-a Peachie!"

Oh, Naga...

I walked briskly to catch up with her once we had been released from the match. This was one conversation I wouldn't be able to plan out...

"Are you feeling alright?"

She stopped in her tracks and looked at me. A small smile formed on her lips. "Yeah! That was fun!"

Hurriedly, she turned away from me—presumably before anyone else could show up.

I hesitated, before placing my right hand on her shoulder. Intimate gesture, I know, but that wasn't the answer I was looking for. "Are you sure?"

"Of course!"

Sighing, I lifted my hand from her shoulder. "Listen, you might fool the others, but you can't fool me. I know you're much more clever than you let on."

"Oh?" She blinked her long lashes at me. "Whatever could you mean?"

Gods, help me. Was I reading too much into this battle? ...No. We were perfectly matched, and then she threw it all away for the sake of her reputation. I'm sure of it.

"During our battle, you showed me what it meant to underestimate an opponent. That could have cost me my life, had it happened anywhere else. After you countered me, I felt as though we were evenly matched. Every moment was exciting and new, and I began to see you in a new light. Tell me..." I struggled to find the right words, "were those feelings... a mistake?"

I'd be lying if I said I wasn't nervous. My palms were sweaty and my throat felt dry, but I had to know the truth.

She remained silent. I decided to try one last time.

"We've all perfected our disguises, Princess. It's simply a matter of finding those we don't fool."

I gazed upon her earnestly, and she stared back at me with her mouth slightly open. A smile began to spread across her face like the first ray of sunshine.

"Damn you, Robin," she whispered.

I blinked back my astonishment and smiled. "All in a day's work."

-x-

And that's how it began. Although I've been having my own doubts lately...

Princess Peach bursts into my room, looking utterly frazzled. She nibbles on the tip of her glove and waits for me to say the magic words.

"So, how was your day?" It's almost a joke at this point. I shut the book I was reading and toss it aside.

"Oh, Robin, it was horrible! I have so many things to do, and such little time to do them!" She begins counting them off with the fingers she's not nibbling on. "I'm supposed to meet Zelda for tea in an hour, play skipping rope with the little ones, bake goodies for Link's bake sale, finish sewing Mario's overalls, and help the *other* Mario file his patient reports!"

I can't help but roll my eyes. "It's not my fault you insist on being perfect." That came out colder than intended, but that's the least of my concerns right now.

"I know, I know..." She wanders over to my bed and buries her face in my pillow. Curses. Now there will be tear-stains later. "I hate everyone!"

Oh, for the love of...

"Calm down." I reach for a clean sheet of parchment paper and a quill. "Let's think about this logically."

And by us, I mean me.

"How about this," I dip my quill into the ink bottle and begin jotting down notes. "Spend fifteen minutes preparing for Zelda's tea party, tell the little ones you'll skip rope with them after yoga class, bake sweets for Link once Rosalina has finished using the kitchen, assist Dr. Mario with his patient reports later this evening, and *I* will take care of the sewing myself."

...What? Don't look at me like that. You think I'd let *Lissa* tailor my beautiful coat?

Peach rushes over to me with a renewed spirit as I hand her the sheet of paper, complete with the dates and proper time slots. "Oh, thank you, Robin!"

She folds the sheet of paper into eighths and tucks it into her sleeve. I sigh wearily.

"Of course." I shoo her away with a wave of my hand. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I have business to attend to."

I glance over at her, expecting her to exit my room, but she's standing there with her arms akimbo.

...Well, it was worth a try, right?

"You know, you've been awfully cross lately, Robin." She leans in slightly with her hands still on her hips, scrutinizing my expression. "What's the matter with you?"

I turn away slightly. "It's nothing."

She tips a blonde eyebrow at me, and I begin to squirm under the scrutiny. Internally, of course.

"I've just been a bit stressed lately."

Peach crosses her arms. "Over what?"

I swallow. Time to play tactician.

"Well, you see," I say, playing it up a little with a dramatic sigh, "Lucina and I are going on a visit to Ylisse tomorrow, and I've simply been a bit overwhelmed with the arrangements."

I nearly smirk. I even feel confident enough to face her fully now, so she doesn't suspect me of any bluffing.

"Ohh?" She taps her plush bottom lip with the tip of a finger. "That's funny, because I chatted with Lucina earlier today, and *she* told me that she was going to be busy training with the 'Great Hero-King' tomorrow."

...Curses.

"And besides," she cocks her hip to the left, "you love visiting Chrom. He's your best friend, right? I would certainly be excited to visit *my* best friend, regardless of the arrangements."

Damn this woman…!

"Like I said," I mutter, suffering a blow to my pride, "it's nothing to be concerned over. Now, leave me be."

"Robin, *please*!" Peach exclaims. "I don't have time for your silly mind-games today! I'm scheduled to meet Zelda for tea in an hour!"

"Well," I say, rising so she is rendered too short to look down upon me, "maybe that's the reason. *Maybe* you've been so busy lately that you've been blind to how I'm truly feeling!" Her eyes widen in astonishment, but it's too late now. "I'm stressed because I have to help you with your petty engagements all the time, because you insist on being perfect! But at the same time, I don't want you to go through this alone because I *care* about you, Peach!"

There is a deep silence. My face burns with shame; above all, a tactician is *never* supposed to lose his composure. Not in the face of friend nor foe. Gods, I can't even bear to look at her right now...

The door opens at that moment, and for once, I'm grateful. Link pokes his head in with an oblivious smile, right as I seat myself back in my chair.

"Evening, Princess," he says warmly. His eyes slide over to regard me. "Robin."

Yes, I'm a bit antisocial here at the Smash Mansion. What of it?

"I've been looking for you." Link walks over and hands her a sack of ingredients; wordlessly, she accepts it. "Can you throw in a couple dozen banana muffins for Donkey Kong and Diddy Kong? Oh, and if it's not too much trouble, some strawberry shortcake for Toon Link? It would make him incredibly happy."

Ugh, I can't bear to watch this any longer. I know of Peach's great respect for Link; for what reason, I do not know. Perhaps she has feelings for him…

She fiddles with the edge of her glove, an inveterate tendency of hers. And then—much to my astonishment—she hands the sack back to Link with a smile.

"Do it yourself."

Naga, am I dreaming…?

Link looks at her, aghast, staring down at the sack as if it is diseased. "But—"

"No buts!" she chides, placing her hands on her hips. "I hear Zelda is a *very* good baker, so if you need help, then ask her instead."

"But..."

"Oh, and while you're at it, do let her know that I won't be able to show up for tea today. Instead, I plan on spending some time with my good friend, Robin."

"*What*?" He looks over at me, as if suddenly registering the fact that Princess Peach and I are friends. And it is at that moment, that I feel a deep sense of pride.

She shoos him out of my room, and he leaves with a scowl. I chuckle to myself, imagining the copious amounts of sweets he'll have to bake later tonight.

Peach closes the door to my room and turns back around. The look on her face dispels my triumph in seconds, leaving me with a small guilt.

"Peach… I wasn't expecting—"

"It's okay," she cuts in, and the smile she wears is broken and beautiful. "I'm tired of baking sweets for people, anyways."

At that moment, I can't help but rise and gather her into my arms. She doesn't push me away, even though she hates my coat, says it's musty and worn.

"I'm sorry, Robin," she says, clinging onto the fabric as she gently weeps, "but I'm so afraid. I don't want them to know."

"It'll be alright," I assure her, stroking her golden hair. "I'm your tactician, remember?"

"No, you're not."

...I'm not sure if I'm supposed to feel relieved or offended.

Either way, she separates from my form and gazes up into my visage, grasping tightly onto my hands.

"You're my friend," she amends, smiling. "I care about you, too, Robin."

I can feel the warmth from her hands between my own, and even though she is wearing gloves,

the contact makes my skin tingle.

Naga, I think I'm coming down with something...

"In that case," my hands slide away from her grasp, and I lift the right one to rest on her shoulder. Intimate gesture, I know, but there *is* a certain answer I'm looking for... "Lucina may be busy training with the Hero-King, but would *you* like to accompany me on a visit to Ylisse instead?"

She taps her plush bottom lip with the tip of a finger. "Only if you promise to let *me* schedule the arrangements."

I sputter helplessly. "WHAT? But—"

"No buts!"

"But..."

"You've handled my personal affairs plenty of times, so let me handle yours, for once."

I let out a sigh of long-suffering. "Fine." A smirk crawls onto my lips. "Only if you promise to let *me* cancel the rest of your engagements."

It's her turn to sputter helplessly. "But, Robin!"

"Yes, Peach?"

"You're so blunt with your social affairs!"

"What of it?"

"And your ego is the size of the multi-verse!"

I smile smugly. "Only because I'm the world's greatest tactician."

She punches me in the arm. Needless to say, you can probably imagine how *that* went.

"Damn you, Robin," she says, smiling.

My own smile extends and I make a show of bowing. "All in a day's work, Princess."

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